

## WATERWALKING

If I were to propose a course I'd say that the coming pages would not, properly speaking, be a discourse on poetics, but rather a few *causeeries* around poems, approaching the edge of sanity (from whatever side) with a balance of curiosity and tactful distance, if not distaste. The less you know the more tactful and circumspect you ought to be. It would be neither the history of any particular period or tradition or mode, nor that of any given poet. The *situation* of the poem may be highlighted though. For there are many *places* of poetry: magic, mysticism, youth, the public forum, breath, history, memory, loss . . . There's also the place of diamond shining.

Of central concern will be the *function* or the workings. Poem is as poem does, and I think one paradoxically learns the

‘how’ of poetry long before understanding the ‘why’. Writing is a process of creating consciousness and thus the making of a self, because awareness is expressed through a vector, however abstract. The *nature* or *intention* of that ‘self’ is of secondary concern.

In so doing I’d want to look at some contradictory givens: the poem as disorderly and unlawful as ‘reality’; the poem predicated upon *breaks* in an attempt to encompass or imitate a *whole*; as stilled movement, or moving stillness. You see, the *position* of the poem may change but the *problem* is the same ever since breath became audible and visible incantation. Poem is a capsule of space and time; it is always finished – you can no less add to it than you can detract from it – yet never completed until such time as it has been consumed (consummated) by you, Reader. Sure, there will be as many original versions as there are readers, since each partaker uncovers her own reading; poem *is* self-enclosed in its thingness, and yet will always depend on the reader for final and total completion. The world is full of strangers. Finally, it is a simple equation playing with invisibles and unsayables as if these could be seen and said, and they are, as “consciousness running away through words” that can carry but not keep. The word becomes world, dense and explosive, but the *sense*

– the location and the reach – depends on or is triggered by the between-words, all those other components and contingencies making (up) the verse: prosody, line, shape, texture, harmony, dissonance, silences, ruptures. The function of the poem is to fuck the words good and hard.

The practice of poetry – as opposed to the coming about of poem – may on the other hand be described as an idle sport framed by the indignities of time. Grown men do it so as to buy cigars; women new garters.

With the above in mind one would want to trace notions and mechanisms of consciousness as flickering in the writings of the Chinese ancients, Rimbaud, Lorca, Celan, Vallejo, Pound . . . , and examine presence/absence and empty/full; of how poems are written in *the possible tense*.

Can we say that the object of writing poems is to create a microcosm “more true than Nature itself”? (Tsong Ping), in which case we are involved in the restitution of vital universal breath? Do we go about this by grasping the internal ‘lines’ of things (which we re-present), thus to fix the relations which they have to one another?

But these ‘force lines’ can only come into becoming (incanted to incarnation) on a background of emptiness (the Void). “Nothing belongs to the trait, [...] not even its own

‘trace’ . . . The outline . . . retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation.” (Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*)

Therefore, in poetry as in the universe: without the Void no circulation of breath and thus no shaping of opposites that, together, ensure harmony. And so one can say that harmony is not possible without movement.

“How do you know that my kind of voyaging doesn’t rejuvenate me in some obscure way?” Fernando Pessoa asks in “A Voyage I Never Made.” Or again, later, in the same text: “. . . my salvation lay in interspaces of unconsciousness.”

Emptiness, expectation, resonance . . . must be built into the verse – indeed, into the very word! Then, when writing arrives at the point of being self-evident, “without traces or footprints,” it will appear to be a natural emanation of the paper, which is itself Emptiness. This ‘invisible’ written, that which has come about on the paper, the ejaculated seed, the spilling of whiteness, will prolong and purify the ‘off-page’ or the ‘beyond-page.’ “Conscious of the White, containing the Black: the way to mystery” – this was said by Huang Pin-Hung in reference to painting.

In this context we’d then look at the nature of the poet, how writing is a means to inventing the self – even as that first

person singular whom we sometimes meet and grimace at in the mirror. “This seeing eye sees itself blind.” (Derrida) We look at the (dangerous) ways in which the line defines, calls forth, confines the future. We try to observe the poet as shaman, healer, historian, magician, agent of transformation, chameleon. We encounter the poet as outlaw and as terrorist.

We move forward.

Only the Tao (tracing/uncovering/writing/walking the flow) can obviate or wipe out the Dharma (the Law, Teaching).

## WRITING IS FISHING

Writing is fishing for memory in time. Viscous. Time black. Sometimes you see it flitting just below surface – memory – miming time. Memory takes on the blackness of time. Memory will be time surfacing. Use word as bait. Beat the water. Beat the weird beat of baited words. Boated. Wounds. The bleeding words like wounded boats on a black sea. Let the fleet wash up. The coast is the beginning of the sea's wisdom. It comes with the territory.

Words have their own territory, they return home as in a song. The fish only discovers the water once it is removed from it. This land a memory.

But not peaceful. Memory as trigger for territory and

tongue. The mind is full of bloody pieces staked out by tongue.  
Is there room enough? Memory killing memory.

Vicious. Terrortory. Territory comes from *terre* just as  
memory flows from *mère*.

And the sea. Sea is the beginning of the metamorphosis of  
the coast.

Let slip. It will all come out in the red wash of remember-  
ing. Invent roominess. Invent, vent, wind. Wind winding up  
mind with bated words.

Mind is dream coming home. Coming to mind. Mind-  
coming. Mindcome all over page. Mind coming to mind,  
minding itself and mending, muttering matter.

Book the writing. Make of book a dormitory full of time  
water. A dreamotory.

Wisdom of vices, virgins and vixens. The bloated bumping  
of drowned bodies just below the purpose. Terrier smelling  
fox barking at porpoises populating the Middle World just  
beyond moon. Shitty sheet. Copulating corpses.

Just over the lip.

## WRITE TO THE TRUTH!

Enough of that! Write to the truth! But writing is not truth. Or is it? Does it make any sense to put the two, writing and truth, in opposition? What is truth? I have never quite understood why there should be this quest for absolute truth. Surely we know that we will never ‘know’ fully? We live in the flame of the consumption of our ignorance. We know – we can experience – a beginning and an end, and yet know nothing of before or after. ‘Truth,’ for me, I’d equate with satisfaction, a deep experience of beauty, a physical and mental well-being.

This needs to be teased out some more. What is it that brings satisfaction? Is it the contentment of understanding or accepting that there’s nothing to understand? The peace that comes after a job well done? Why is it important that



a job should be well done? Is this a cultural reflex? And why and how do I experience beauty? Was this taught to me? Are there certain forms and manifestations of beauty that will be experienced alike by all humans whatever their conditioning? Surely there must be a number of inherent characteristics, ‘presences’ that we are sensitive to, that will provoke similar reactions wherever we may be?

*Harmony* I’d say is one. *Balance* may be a clearer approach: the experience (and the acceptance) of coming and going, ups and downs, light and dark, cycles beyond good and bad. *Shape* may be one such satisfaction-giving ‘presence,’ because it helps me to situate myself and thus promote consciousness. *Pattern* too (and of course the breaks), because it reminds me that there is on-going, there is resonance – we sometimes incestuously confuse these with ‘sense.’ *Texture* must be another: the joy of the feel, *the pleasure of experiencing the state of being alive.*

Will that be ‘truth’ then – accepting (knowing) that you don’t understand, that you’re only part of an ongoing process, that there is no good or evil or reason, no origin and no finality, no final form and no definitive content, and then the superb pleasure of *experiencing being?*

Writing is neither an explanation nor an expiation of our

condition. Should it try to convey ‘certainties’ it would be like weighing our food down with stones. Writing is an extrapolation of the reality of not-knowing – some would say an excommunication thereof! It is a reflection (and a refraction) of being, of becoming, of consuming, of a process. It is the preening of wings with which we will not fly. (This does not mean that we cannot fly . . .) It constitutes the weaving of the skin of being which will carry the signs and the stigmata of our ‘truth’ of inconclusiveness.

We inscribe ourselves in a text in progress since all time. We pick up tunes and try to carry the rhythm. We chime with the ancestors. Kafka, in a letter to Max Brod: “Kleist breathes in me like an old pig’s bladder.” (Important then, not to be kicked around or to burst inadvertently.)

Maybe I prefer writing – the ongoing un-search with its innate impulse toward manifestation, and its own laws (due to its nature and origin and history), the knocking against the tomb’s walls – maybe I prefer this knocking about to a scratching around for truth because I sense that the latter will be final and fatal, a full stop, *le point mort*. Who says one has any choice in the matter? Perhaps one should just feign truth the way a politician would, and live as if you knew that life was worth living. Perhaps the fantasy (and the fancy) of who and what

we think we are is just the fleshing out of the reality of what we already and since always have been. “Reality is frighteningly superior to all fiction. All you need is the genius to know how to interpret it” (Antonin Artaud). Still, part of the joy of writing beyond interpretation must surely be the possibility (or the illusion) of passing into ‘the other world’, of writing oneself into the extinction of reality.

In Poble Gran there’s a Museum of the Cinema, an interior consisting of mirrors and thus, curiously, without walls. The limitless enclosure. On a partition I saw this note: “The mirror reflects the human mask, it creates a new awareness of identity and leads to vanity, but it also provides a link between truth and appearance, awakening our desire for an unreal world.” From one room to another illusory space, as in a labyrinth, we come upon the dream-making machines, *camera obscura* or *camera lucida*, lenses and projections and animations that man invented to fool the illusion of reality. Deeper inside the museum there is an exhibition of texts and photos from a movie shot on the Costa Brava during the early fifties: Ava Gardner – luminous and tall and shapely and American – and opposite her Mario Cabré the poet bullfighter, his back braced and his hair oiled down, his eyes flashing the pride of the poor *hidalgo*. The way they looked at one another was a lark’s

mirror neither of them could resist. In a glass case you can see the volume of poems he wrote for her. Frank Sinatra had to fly in to protect his relationship with Ms Gardner – a photo shows his fashionable wide pants, the florid tie, the cigarette dangling nonchalantly, the scowl on his face. Perhaps he lured her back ‘home’ to Hollywood with whisky and money and tinsel fame. She wouldn’t have lasted here. Her mother-in-law would have been dressed in black; sooner or later her lover would have been gored in a ring flooded and blinded by light, blood as a fountain of red carnations flowering from his groin.

I write the above on a blue day outside Poble Gran, making notes for the book I’m working on, to be called *On The Art Of Being Intimate With Strangers*. I’m sitting in front of the ancient stone-walled house of Can Ocells, still in the shade of the cloak of night. August 15th is always the moment of turning, around the Mediterranean the air becomes cooler. It will be as if everything comes to its senses after the folly and the heat of summer. Your ears still sing with the intensity of flames. Now there’s withdrawal, rethinking. Nights are getting longer. Plants – the laurel shrubs, some rosebushes – take heart and go into a second and more gentle blooming. The rosemary bush and the patch of mint are in flower: bees

are busy and multi-hued butterflies are at work like fluttering handkerchiefs from scent to scent – goodbye, goodbye. Over the distant volcanic mountain range toward Banyoles and Olot a white cloud has unfurled its sails and a pink hot-air balloon (*a mongolfière*) drifts along on its flame. Swallows dart and swerve, sharply outlined against the sky. Other birds are twittering and chirruping their morning prayers. Yesterday I spent cutting back an overgrown climber, pulling up weeds and nettles, hacking at bramble bushes, training the honeysuckle, stacking cut branches for the winter. I watered the vines, the olive and the palms. The weeds will all grow back and the nurtured plants come to naught as if nothing had happened. Man's hand is ineffectual. The pruning and shaping will have to be recommenced eternally. Some plants will die and others will survive our prolonged absence to suddenly spurt flowers and sweet odors.

As a friend of mine once said: “Those who live will see; the dead will have to peep through closed eyelids as if looking into the mirror.” They are twin brothers under the skin, breath and death. Why does it all make me feel so *good*?